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System Contradiction and Political Transformation

I

DAVID LOCKWOOD has drawn attention to two related but analytically distinct types of integration in society: social integration, referring to the relationship between groups—more especially classes or strata; and system integration referring to the degree of connectedness between institutional parts of the social order (1). The former type of integration concerns the social relations between actors, so that the problem of order in society is posed in terms of moral or normative categories. The second type of integration directs attention to the somewhat more technical or non-normative aspects of order, concerning as it does the degree of 'fit' or compatibility between various functionally connected institutions. Both types of integration are of course central to Marx's theory of social change. For Marx, the antagonisms stemming from weaknesses in social integration (exemplified in the extreme case by class polarization) plus the weaknesses in system integration (the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production) are understood to be the twin mechanisms responsible for social transformation. As many critics have pointed out, the exact nature of the link between these two different processes was never clearly specified by Marx. But it does seem apparent that system contradiction is regarded as causally prior to the cleavage, and ultimate conflict, between classes, since it's not until these contradictions in the system become irresolvable that the stage is set for the final showdown between contending classes.

Given the importance that this notion of system contradiction occupies in Marx's whole theoretical scheme it is, as Lockwood

(1) David LOCKWOOD, *Social Integration and System Integration*, in George K. ZOLLSCHAN and Walter HIRSCH (eds.), *Explorations in Social Change* (London, Routledge, 1964).

points out, rather surprising that it should have been largely disregarded by sociologists—even by those specifically concerned with conflict models. Instead, the main preoccupation has been with class antagonism, which can in some respects be regarded as a derivative phenomenon. This is, perhaps, partly because of the difficulty in establishing clearly the “breakdown mechanisms” in different societies, including capitalism. Moreover, given the apparent ability of this particular system to survive the almost countless prophecies of imminent collapse, through crises of overproduction, the falling rate of profit, or whatever, it is understandable that sociologists should have come to regard the notion of system contradiction with some suspicion.

In this paper I try to show that the concept can be usefully employed in analysing certain aspects of the problem of order in industrial society. And there is a certain pleasing irony in the fact that it seems particularly appropriate to the understanding of state socialist societies, notwithstanding the official Marxist view that the overthrow of capitalism heralds the end of internal contradictions. The view advanced here is that the notion of system contradiction is only useful when considered in relation to certain aspects of the stratification order, and more particularly, with what could be referred to as “power equilibrium” and “elite differentiation”. By power equilibrium is meant simply a high degree of congruence between the various dimensions of stratification, such that economic, social and political power follow roughly the same pattern of distribution. Power disequilibrium is said to occur where these three elements of the stratification order do not exhibit the same general profile. It may be suggested that under this condition there will typically be alternative or competing bases of elite legitimation, so giving rise to a differentiation or polarization of elites. In a nutshell my argument is that only when a society is characterized by elite differentiation do system contradictions become significant for the problem of social transformation. Where, on the other hand, the stratification order is in equilibrium, the elite structure will typically be one of uniformity, not differentiation. Under these conditions, weaknesses in system integration will not generally entail a threat to the social order.

In a sense, the whole of the scheme adopted here could be said to rest on some kind of equilibrium model; but not so much the equilibrium model derived from structural-functionalism, as that implicit in Marx’s own formula. The difference is of course that the structural-functionalist approach is to treat the social system as a self-regulating mechanism operating in a timeless void. Whereas for

Marx, the states of equilibrium and disequilibrium are understood as alternating processes by which societies are moved along in a sequence of historical change. One could say that, for Marx, a society becomes ripe for social transformation when the stratification order is in disequilibrium; that is, when the class which is (say) economically dominant through its control of the productive process is not the class which is politically dominant. The tensions which this imbalance generates can only be resolved by one and the same class winning mastery over all the elements of power—social, economic and political. The paradigm case is of course that of an ascendant bourgeoisie being politically subordinate to a declining aristocracy. The ideal-type bourgeois revolution can thus be seen as the mechanism which restores the stratification order to a state of equilibrium by concentrating all the dimensions of power in the hands of one social class. The next stage in the developmental sequence is then scheduled for that point in time when capitalism itself would give rise to new forms of disequilibrium which would be resolved in the same conclusive manner.

Crucial to the understanding of this whole conceptual scheme is the role of the ascendant class. For Marx, a social class only assumes dominance in society when it is the social embodiment of those institutional and material forces which define the essential character of the social system—or its “core institutional order”. Thus the historical progression of societies through different stages is closely linked to the ascendance of that particular class whose members possess the qualities and attributes best fitted to cope with the newly emergent material forces and new institutional tasks (2). In true Darwinian fashion a class dominant in one epoch is earmarked for liquidation as soon as the social forces on which its dominance rests have given way to new conditions, so preparing the ground for the ascendancy of a different class better able to respond to the new challenge. Not until a social class has reached this state of ascendancy within the framework of the old order is it able to bring about system change by assuming political mastery.

Now it is clear from all this that the successful transition from capitalism to socialism must, in terms of Marx's theory, presuppose the emergence of a class which embodies a distinctive set of social and productive relationships of a non-bourgeois kind which contain the promise of resolving the contradictions within capitalism. To

(2) One must here surely agree with Lockwood that « there is nothing metaphysical about the general notion of social

relationships being somehow implicit in a given set of material conditions » (Lockwood, *op. cit.* p. 251).

use Marx's gynaecological metaphor, the embryo of the new socio-economic system must always mature in the womb of the old order. It was therefore necessary for Marx to show that embryonic forms of socialism were developing within the body of capitalism, just as bourgeois social relations and a market economy had been slowly nurtured within the old feudal order. And Marx did in fact detect two different tendencies within capitalism which he took to be early forms of the emergent productive forces which would come to replace private property relations, and so prepare the ground for the demise of the bourgeoisie. The first of these developments was the rise of the joint stock company. He saw the separation of ownership from control, and the expansion of the shareholding system, as a corrosive force at work on capitalist property relations; and although this in itself was not to be understood as social ownership in its pure form, it was a transitional stage to this ideal.

In stock companies the function is divorced from capital ownership, hence also labour is entirely divorced from ownership of means of production and surplus labour. This result of the ultimate development of capitalist production is a necessary transitional phase towards the reconversion of capital into the property of producers, although no longer as the private property of the individual producers, but rather as the property of associated producers, as outright social property [...] (3).

As Marx saw it, this development heralded "the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself" and could thus be understood as "a mere phase of transition to a new form of production" (4).

A second and parallel development was the growth of the workers' co-operative movement. For Marx, this movement brought into being a new kind of property in which "the antithesis between labour and capital is overcome" (5). The co-operative factory system demonstrated "how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one, when the development of the material forces of production, and of the corresponding forms of social production have reached a particular stage. Without the factory system arising out of the capitalist mode of production there could have been no co-operative factories" (6).

Here then is evidence for the kind of development that Marx was intent on discovering—a new social form arising within the shell of the old—which for him is always a precondition for the ascendancy of a new class (in this case the proletariat), the class which is the social

(3) *Capital* (Moscow 1961), III, p. 428.

(4) *Capital*, III, p. 429.

(5) *Capital*, III, p. 431.

(6) *Loc. cit.*

embodiment of the emergent productive forces. It is no part of Marx's scheme to suggest that a class which has *not* reached such a position of ascendancy could effectively become the new dominant class. As Avinieri has recently pointed out, the notion that the proletariat could assume power while it was still the totally subordinate class is a purely Leninist one (7). For Lenin, the proletariat could make the revolution first and then set about creating the social and economic foundations upon which its political supremacy would rest. This is a complete reversion of Marx's priorities. For Marx, political power can only *actualize* the potential already *existing* within the society; it cannot fashion social and material realities according to some abstract formula or design. It could be argued then, that the revolution failed to bring about socialism in the Soviet Union not simply because it occurred in an economically backward society (which is the standard explanation) but because the proletariat was not the ascendant class (8). For even if a society was economically advanced, the transition could still not properly be made while the proletariat was the totally subordinate class. Indeed given the fact that proletarian ascendancy does not appear to coincide with advanced industrialism, and that the cooperative movement and joint stock ownership no longer seem to be transitional or embryonic forms of a new social order, then the very possibility of the successful transformation from capitalism to socialism becomes highly problematic. Expressed somewhat differently, in so far as the bourgeoisie remain the socially, economically and politically dominant class, then the stratification order is in equilibrium. And under this condition there is no internal tension that has to be resolved through radical social transformation. This point is touched upon again later when the elite structure of modern capitalism is under discussion.

II

As far as state socialist societies are concerned, the same equilibrium condition does not prevail. One could say in fact that the seizure of power created disequilibrium in the stratification order where previously there was none. Moreover, it is precisely as a result

(7) Shlomo Avinieri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge 1968), pp. 181-182.

(8) Cf. Plekhanov's prediction that the

premature seizure of power in the name of the proletariat would result in a system of "Peruvian tutelage".

of this that weaknesses in system integration are a more distinctive feature of socialist society than of modern capitalism. Now weaknesses at the system level tend to find expression at the social level in the form of conflict between groups or collectivities; indeed these opposing groups may be even thought of as personifying conflicting system elements—that is, as social typifications of diffuse structural processes. In socialist society the key antagonisms occurring at the social level are those between the party and state bureaucracy on the one hand and the intelligentsia on the other. The power of the former rests upon their control of the political and administrative apparatus of the state, giving them effective legal guardianship of socialized property. The social power of the latter group inheres in its command of the skills, knowledge and general attributes which are held to be of central importance for the development of productive and scientific forces in modern industrial society. Examples of weaknesses in system integration, of which these conflicts are the social symptom, have received ample documentation. Probably the most familiar are those problems associated with the attempt to maximise industrial efficiency within the framework of a highly centralized political economy. The command system appears to operate quite effectively during the early stages of development, when the primary emphasis is on capital accumulation; but at more advanced stages of growth, and with the emphasis shifting to light industry and consumer goods production, the dirigist system becomes increasingly dysfunctional. It is when the crucial phase of the “second industrial revolution” is reached that the command mechanism becomes unable to cope satisfactorily with the volume of information and detailed decisions necessary to the smooth working of the economy. The leading east German economist, Fritz Behrens, was only one among many who pointed to a “contradiction [...] between the form of state direction of the economy and the content of the quickly developing economic substructure” (9). Attempts to resolve this contradiction have raised the delicate problem of how to curtail the economic powers of the central apparatus without eroding the party’s monopoly of political authority. Resistance to economic reforms has been strongest among members of the party apparatus and state administration, whose personal authority would be seriously undermined by a radical switch from plan criteria to market criteria. Seen in ideal-typical terms, the controversy over the economy is most sharply expressed

(9) Cited by Thomas A. BAYLIS, “The Technocrats in the DDR”, *Survey*, LXI (1966), p. 141.

in the form of conflict between the apparatchiki and the intelligentsia, respectively the main opponents and advocates of reform (10). Czechoslovakia was an exceptional case only in the extent to which the latent but ever-present tensions between these two groups erupted into open political conflict—a showdown precipitated by the inability of the existing system to cope with economic crisis (11).

It is not in the least fanciful to suggest that the crisis came about as a result of the forces of production coming into direct conflict with the social relations of production; in other words, that the legal and political order buttressing the command system had become a 'fetter' on the further development of productive forces. The events leading up to and culminating in the "Prague spring" might thus be seen as a paradigm case of system contradiction leading to pressures for internal transformation in line with the classic Marxist formula. Furthermore, a latter-day Marx seeking to locate within socialist society an ascendant class closely identified with the transformation, and capable of pushing it through, would doubtless find the intelligentsia the obvious candidate for the post. It seems clear that in all socialist states the intelligentsia occupies a position of high social and material standing in the stratification hierarchy by virtue of its command over socially valued knowledge and expertise. In empirical studies of status ranking, moreover, they are invariably shown to be higher in the scale of social honour than the party bureaucrats. In a sense, then, this group is popularly regarded, and seems to regard itself, as the social embodiment of those scientific, economic and creative forces which are felt to be indispensable to the quest for modernity and social progress (12).

However, as in previous epochs, the ascendant class in socialist society is not the class which wields political power. Indeed, it is because political authority is concentrated elsewhere—in the hands of

(10) The struggles over economic reform cannot be understood in terms of the clear-cut categories of a morality play. Western social scientists tend to explain opposition to the reforms solely in terms of the bureaucrats' defence of their own power and privileges, whereas the advocates of reform are seen merely to be acting in the national interest. The situation is more complex. Both groups invoke notions of the public good which also conceal claims to power.

(11) Initially the most advanced state in the socialist bloc, Czechoslovakia had by 1963 become "the only industrial country

in the entire world to register a decrease in industrial output, national income and real wages". Harry G. SCHAFER, Czechoslovakia's New Economic Model, in George R. FEIWEL (ed.), *New Currents in Soviet-Type Economics* (Scranton 1968), p. 466.

(12) For a trenchant affirmation of this view see the analysis of modern society produced by the Czech Academy of Arts and Sciences under the editorship of Radovan Richta, *Civilization at the Crossroads: Social and Human Implications of the Scientific and Technological Revolution* (Prague 1967).

the party apparatus—that the stratification order can be characterized as one of disequilibrium. And this is a social condition which generates internal tensions that can only be fully resolved through a reconstitution of the different elements of power in the hands of the same social group. Seen from this angle, equilibrium could be restored by the accession to political power of the intelligentsia and the displacement of the apparatchiki. Once this was achieved (and again the events in Czechoslovakia give some indication of possible lines of development) the new men of power would be in a position to de-politicize the economy by introducing strategic shifts from plan to market (13).

It must be emphasized here that contradictions in the productive system should be understood as a particular case of a more general condition. Dysfunctions in the economy are largely attributable to the informational blocks which a highly centralized political structure tends to set up. But the central control of economic and technical information is merely part of a more generalized political surveillance over the dissemination of knowledge in all its forms. The embargo on the free circulation of ideas and information is a strategy designed to enhance system stability through the suppression of all social knowledge which detracts from official versions of reality. The existing socialist order would in fact be seriously undermined by any relaxation of the controls on knowledge, since the party's criteria of what counts as social fact cannot often be squared with common-sense criteria. However, the party's claim to the monopoly of truth is in effect self-defeating in that it negates the regime's attempts to secure moral support and system legitimacy. Direct political censorship of knowledge and information results not in the desired conformity of outlook but in widespread scepticism or disbelief in the validity of officially blessed facts. The sanctification of revolutionary truth is especially difficult to achieve in east European societies because of the state's inability to seal off competing versions of reality which emanate from neighbouring western sources. The credibility, and hence the legitimacy, of the socialist regime is naturally most suspect in the eyes of those with greatest access to external information—the intelligentsia—although clearly the broad mass of the population does not lack opportunities to compare official claims against personal experience. Thus although the present system would be unlikely to survive under conditions of free enquiry and open debate, the regime's very attempt to suppress politically unacceptable know-

(13) Cf. Ota ŠIK, *Plan and Market under Socialism* (Prague 1966).

ledge destroys those claims to moral authority by which it seeks to rule. This contradiction seems irresolvable within the existing order and is probably of greater import for system stability than are the contradictions associated with the productive sphere. Indeed, it may be quite possible for socialist states eventually to overcome many of the dysfunctions of a command economy without dismantling the apparatus of political control, as in the case of east Germany. But this would not eradicate the basic contradiction between the political censorship of knowledge and the quest for legitimacy, as again the east German case illustrates all too vividly.

III

As previously suggested, one important reason why disequilibrium in the stratification order leads to pressures for internal change is that this is the social condition most amenable to the differentiation of elites. And part of the argument advanced here is that only when elites exhibit a high degree of differentiation are weaknesses in system integration likely to result in pressures making for system change. The reason that social disequilibrium and elite differentiation go hand in hand is that a non-crystallized stratification order provides multiple bases for elite recruitment and legitimacy. Medieval society provides the archetypal illustration of this, though a similar situation prevails in many kinds of pre-industrial society. In the standard case, the society will contain groups like the clergy, whose claims to authority rest upon sacramental knowledge; a military caste basing itself on the possession of arms and warrior skills; a merchant class deriving wealth and influence from the monopoly of trade; and so forth. Each group seeks to legitimize its power and privileges by reference to different criteria, and there are no commonly accepted criteria which could provide the basis for a uniform status order. Thus, where there are multiple bases of social legitimacy within the same society, the scene is set for the diversification of elites, all basing their claims to power on the possession of different status attributes.

In industrial society, this situation does not usually occur to the same extent. The long run tendency is for the reward structure to become closely tied to the division of labour, so that occupational and educational criteria come to provide the cornerstone of the whole edifice of stratification. Now, both socialist and capitalist versions of industrial society each contain an alternative source of elite recruitment and legitimacy to that primary one associated with the division

of labour. In capitalist society, property ownership is the one obvious alternative; while in socialist society it is party office. Party elites and propertied elites might thus be said to be in a roughly similar structural situation in so far as the values which underwrite their privileged position are different from the values which guarantee the position of most other groups in society. To the extent, then, that we can detect quite distinct bases of legitimacy, the way seems clear for elite differentiation or cleavage in both types of society.

However, it would seem to be the case that this particular development is much more characteristic of socialist society than of modern capitalism. At any rate, there is no obvious counterpart in western society to the kind of elite polarization which manifested itself in Czechoslovakia, and which typically exists in a rather less dramatic form in most east European states. The question is, then, why should elite structure be more unitary under capitalism than under socialism? Two reasons may be suggested. The first is to do with purely social aspects of elite recruitment. In socialist states the cleavage between the political bureaucracy and the intelligentsia is partly a matter of social background and education. The typical member of the party apparatus, especially in the important middle levels of the hierarchy, will be of peasant stock, and with no formal education beyond the elementary level. The typical member of the white collar elite will probably be of urban, middle class background, and of course a university graduate. These differences in social pedigree, formal education and culture tend to encourage differing perceptions of social and political problems notwithstanding the absence of sharp inequalities in the material condition of the two groups.

A second and much more important factor in elite polarization is that arising directly from functional differences between the two groups. Members of the party and state bureaucracy are dependent for their position and privileges on the centralized command system and the whole apparatus of political patronage which accompanies it. Any threat to the bureaucratic principle is a direct threat to those whose authority rests largely on the qualities of proven loyalty and obedience to political superiors. And in this category must be included the managers or directors of industrial firms, since under a command system they operate mainly as administrators—that is, middle level functionaries in the state apparatus. This immediate dependence on a higher chain of command means that the enterprise director is an entirely different animal from the manager of a capitalist firm, with altogether different tasks to perform and requiring different

personal qualities to ensure success. The notion of the enterprise director as the spearhead of a potential managerial revolution is completely ludicrous in the context of socialist society; in fact the managers have generally allied themselves with the opponents of economic reform, since their political and administrative qualities would be of no use in a non-bureaucratic setting. Like most other members of the party and state administration their particular skills and attributes are highly specific to this *one particular version* of industrial society, and are not readily transferable to some alternative version. This entire group thus has an obvious stake in the preservation of the existing order, in a way that the intelligentsia does not. The latter have the kinds of skills which are at a premium in any type of modern society irrespective of its political make-up. And it is because the intelligentsia themselves are clearly aware of this fact that their virtual exclusion from political power is such a serious point of tension in the socialist system.

One further contributing factor here is that the socialist white-collar intelligentsia, immersed as they are in the mainstream of European science and culture, are in a position to contrast their lot with that of their west European counterparts—who do not on the whole appear to regard themselves as subordinate to a morally, socially and culturally inferior political class. Now if it were the case that the socialist intelligentsia did *not* in fact feel some sort of collective resentment over their political subordination, then the notion of equilibrium, as here employed, would be rendered useless. For the basic assumption on which this notion rests is that a social group or class which feels itself raised to a position of strategic social importance, will wish to acquire political authority for itself and to remove it from those who lack the technical and moral qualities which are felt to be the one legitimate source of all power. If such a group *did* emerge in a society but developed no consciousness of its own moral superiority, and was content to have its hands kept off the levers of political power, then no general claim could be advanced that disequilibrium in the stratification order is a major source of tension and of potential system change. But at any rate, as far as the particular case under review is concerned the assumption is a plausible one, in so far as the socialist intelligentsia does appear to have something approaching a common moral identity, and a sense of its own latent power being held in check illegitimately.

Two factors contributing to this moral distinctiveness of the intelligentsia may be singled out for special comment. The first concerns the quasi-colonial status of the east European countries.

The intelligentsia in most of these countries has historically acted as the standard bearer of national consciousness. The literary and creative elements in particular have played a key role in preserving the sense of nationhood and cultural unity during periods of foreign domination and shifting political boundaries. There is perhaps more than a grain of truth in the elitist view that under these critical conditions the intelligentsia *is* the embodiment of nationhood and the watchdog of cultural and moral unity. The present fact of Soviet domination throughout eastern Europe ensures that the intelligentsia will continue to act as guardians of national identity within the limits imposed by political surveillance and official displeasure. Moreover, the role and standing of the intelligentsia contrast markedly with that of the political bureaucracy, who are readily identified with the Soviet regime and whose very survival is guaranteed largely by the presence or threatened appearance of comradely tanks from the East. Thus it is not merely the intelligentsia's claim to functional importance which encourages a moral bond, but their symbolic role as guardians of national consciousness and the figureheads of independence (14).

A second factor reinforcing this same tendency concerns the role of conflict as a unifying social force. Collective identity of a class or political kind emerges most strongly among members of a nominal group which is caught up in a process of continuing conflict with some other clearly demarcated social group. In the absence of such ongoing conflict the potentialities inherent in purely formal or structural similarities do not generally transcend the latency stage. A striking difference between the professional middle classes of capitalist society and their socialist counterparts in this respect is that the former are not confronted by powerful and clearly definable opponents analogous to the communist party bureaucracy. It is doubtless partly on account of this that the western members of what Galbraith has dubbed the "educational and scientific estate" significantly lack that sense of a shared moral identity implied by the self-designation 'intelligentsia'. In other words it is the close-knit and politically combative nature of the hegemonic party itself which helps to account

(14) While the use of the blanket term 'intelligentsia' does not of course imply a completely homogeneous group it is probably misleading to insist upon drawing sharp internal distinctions—e.g. between scientific and creative categories. In critical situations such distinctions appear wholly artificial. It is instructive to note that even in the Soviet Union political

protest against the trial and imprisonment of dissident writers has not been confined to the literary intelligentsia but has included many members of the scientific and technical elite. For documentation on this point see the detailed lists of signatories to protest petitions reproduced in *Problems of Communism*, XVII (1968), pp. 39-73.

for the special character of the socialist intelligentsia. It is thus on the basis of this combination of social, functional and moral differences between the two groups that one can describe the elite structure of socialist society as highly differentiated or polarized.

The contrast with modern capitalist society is instructive. Elites in this system have a much greater degree of uniformity, both in social and functional terms. In the first place, those recruited to elite positions are drawn from a far more restricted social circle than are their socialist counterparts. Upward mobility into these positions occurs on such a minor scale that it can always be accompanied by an intensive programme of assimilation into elite culture. The effect of all this is to preserve a remarkable degree of social homogeneity among those who staff positions of power and privilege in western society. Secondly, and more importantly, there is no functional separation between different elite groupings, arising from different principles of elite recruitment and legitimacy. As already acknowledged, there are two distinct sets of principles which serve to underwrite privileged positions in capitalist society; one associated with occupational achievement, and the other with private property. The crucial point is, though, that these two sets of legitimating principles do not give rise to separate and discrete groupings, one based solely on wealth and the other on the division of labour. A key characteristic of almost any given elite group in capitalist society is that it will have a social mix exemplifying both sets of principles. Political leadership for example is not the sole prerogative of men of property, nor is the industrial elite comprised only of men of qualifications—or vice versa. In fact it is highly artificial to attempt to draw sharp distinctions between a propertied bourgeoisie on the one hand and a professionally qualified middle class on the other. To begin with, those who inherit family wealth no longer constitute anything resembling a leisure class. Typically, those born into wealth will now use it to secure for themselves or their children educational privileges designed to ensure equally privileged entry into one of the professions. This is one way in which fusion has taken place between the two different bases of reward. The other way is through the opportunities available to the professionally qualified to become property owners themselves. The most striking instance of this is the case of industrial managers and executives becoming major shareholders in the companies they control. But share ownership is becoming increasingly common among the professional middle classes generally, as indicated by the rapid growth of unit trusts. These two parallel developments, then, have forestalled the emer-

gence of two clearly demarcated elites, each seeking to establish legitimacy by reference to mutually exclusive principles of status and reward. When those born to wealth are gainfully employed, and the professionally skilled have access to unearned rewards, then property and qualifications can be accepted as complementary bases of privilege and not as antagonistic principles. Those who insist that the distinction between ownership and non-ownership of property is still the major source of cleavage in the stratification order of capitalist society appear not to have grasped the significance of current developments.

One signal indication of the extent of elite fusion is the common allegiance of both propertied and qualified groups to the same political symbols and bourgeois parties. To be sure, the professional middle classes have become fully integrated into the ruling order not simply through their influence on the party system but, more tellingly, through their ability to dominate a power structure based on pluralism. Bourgeois democracy is in fact a system which is highly responsive to the demands of an educated middle class in so far as it ensures greatest political leverage to those who command the most privileged positions in the marketplace. This fact that western members of the educational and scientific estate have become so thoroughly assimilated into the power structure is, as hinted at above, one important reason for the lack of that sense of moral and social distinctiveness which is the hallmark of an intelligentsia.

The claim that modern capitalism has a unitary elite structure seems to have an important bearing on the whole problem of system contradiction and its relation to internal change. In brief, it may be suggested that system contradictions are most likely to generate pressures for change when elites are polarized, so that the unitary nature of elites under capitalism would give it rather more stability than could be predicted from the theory of system-crisis taken on its own. One reason for this is that a unified elite is able to respond more effectively to potential threats to the system. They can usually introduce ameliorative measures which avert or stave off impending crisis without dismantling the system itself in any serious way. A polarized elite, on the other hand, is much less responsive to the threat of crisis mainly because any adaptations will tend to bring advantages to one group and disadvantages to the other. Consider, for example, the readiness and facility with which capitalist society adopted Keynesian economic reforms, thereby counteracting the tendencies towards cyclical crisis—a move which among other things converted unemployment from a potential political threat to a “social problem”.

Contrast this adaptability with the relative inability of socialist states to implement the economic reforms designed to overcome their internal contradictions. Why, we may ask, was Keynes acceptable but not Liberman? The answer is that Libermanism threatens to alter the balance of authority between the political bureaucracy and the white-collar intelligentsia; whereas the interests of elites under capitalism are not sufficiently differentiated for Keynesianism to be construed in politically divisive terms. The notion of system contradiction must thus be set against the background of elite structure when assessing the potential for system change. This is a recommendation which is also implied in the Marxist notion that "a split in the ruling class" is a necessary precondition of radical social transformation. And on this score the survival value of capitalism should perhaps be rated somewhat higher than the proponents of all the various crisis theories would encourage one to expect.

IV

Finally, then, we may turn to the question of whether the elites in socialist states are likely to become less polarized and to move towards a more unitary structure. Predictions that such a development must inevitably occur are frequently met with in the literature on Soviet systems. The argument is that the political bureaucracy cannot effectively control society if its own functionaries are less well equipped technically than members of the intelligentsia. Therefore the tendency will be for the party to ensure that new recruits to the bureaucracy will be men with the same kind of education and training as the intelligentsia. The end result of this process is that the apparatchiki will be virtually indistinguishable from the white-collar specialists; the two groups will have become fused even though the system of centralized command will remain more or less intact. Now there certainly is evidence that leaders of the bureaucracy have become concerned about the relatively low technical standards of the men who staff the apparatus, and that efforts are continually being made to improve these standards. The dilemma facing the leadership, however, is that any devaluation of political criteria in favour of technical criteria carries with it the risk of secularizing the party. If the party apparatus came to be controlled exclusively by men more noted for their paper qualifications than for their ideological loyalty, then this would be tantamount to ultimate political victory for the white-collar intelligentsia. One reason why the present political leadership

would probably resist such a development is that a transfer of power of this kind would be likely to undermine the party's total domination of society. The *raison d'être* of the hegemonic party is to preserve political control in the hands of a social group which could not legitimate its power and privileges by reference to the same criteria which govern the distribution of rewards among the population at large. The skills and attributes of the political bureaucracy are useful mainly for the maintenance of the apparatus which is its own creation; they are not skills which are intrinsically necessary to an industrial society. This is perhaps another way of saying that the political bureaucracy cannot be regarded as the ascendant class within its own society. And where the political class is not also the ascendant class, its survival can only be guaranteed by a hegemonic party exercising total dominion over men and ideas. The tight censorship upon the circulation of knowledge and creative ideas is indicative of a ruling class which is uncertain of its own legitimacy, and for whom even poetry can be construed as a potential threat to political survival. A political class which is also the ascendant class has much less need to police the thoughts and activities of subordinate groups. The European bourgeoisie, for example, has generally regarded itself as politically secure and as having a 'natural' command of all the centres of power. This confidence in its own legitimacy was a precondition for the flowering of bourgeois liberal ideology, with its institutionalized support for civil liberties, including formal rights of political dissent and the free circulation of knowledge. The granting of such sights is felt to be possible only because no other class or group in the society is seen as a serious natural contender for political power. In this situation, the coercive machinery of the state can usually be kept in the background of social life, as a means of last resort, rather than as an instrument of day to day political survival.

What all this suggests, then, is that if the communist party apparatus was to undergo a process of what Weber would call 'usurpation' by the white-collar intelligentsia, the very rationale of a hegemonic party would be thrown into question. For once the ascendant class had become the political class, it would have no obvious need to protect itself by the strategy of total surveillance and the control of knowledge. It seems unlikely however that the present party leadership is unaware of the possible consequences of secularization. And unless one believes that ideology has no bearing on men's actions, it is difficult to envisage the leadership allowing the principles of recruitment to be changed in such a way as might weaken the party's

grip on society—thereby, as they perceive it, putting at risk the future of communism (15).

As long as the attainment of the party's historic mission is felt to depend on men with distinctive attributes of loyalty and obedience, then the party apparatus is likely to continue to choose its own successors with care. And men whose primary commitment is to the political bureaucracy, whose rewards and privileges, authority and influence are dependent on this commitment are, by this very fact, a clearly demarcated social group, whatever purely technical qualities they may have in common with other men. It is this functional difference between the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia which lies at the root of the cleavage between the two elites, and which mere improvement in the former's technical qualities will not eradicate.

V

In summary, this has been an attempt to show that Marx's concept of system contradiction can be usefully employed in the comparative analysis of industrial societies. The proviso entered here was that system contradictions have to be understood in relation to certain aspects of the stratification order—and more particularly to elite structure and the distribution of power. It was argued that socialist society is characterized by disequilibrium in the stratification order—a condition stemming from the fact that the seizure of power was carried out in the name of a class which was totally subordinate in society. The effect of this was to put political power in the hands of bureaucratic class, rather than an ascendant class, so creating a cleavage at the apex of the social system. This cleavage in the elite structure tends to exacerbate tensions arising from weaknesses in system integration, and makes adaptations to system deficiencies difficult to accomplish.

This situation was contrasted with that of modern capitalism, a society in which power in all its dimensions is monopolized by the

(15) Even in east Germany, where technical expertise and political authority are especially closely linked, there is a clear separation of the two spheres at the apex of power. As Baylis's study shows, the technical specialists control the Council of Ministers, but the apparatchiki still dominate the Politburo. "The peculiar division of labour between the 'political'

Politburo and the 'economic' Council of Ministers may be seen as reflecting the present unstable equilibrium of east German politics". Moreover, in critical situations, "the apparatchiki are in a position to enforce political requirements at the expense of economic ones [...]" (BAYLIS, *op. cit.* p. 151).

same class. The unification of elites that this condition entails, means that the dominant class is usually able to respond effectively to potential system crisis (16). At the same time, this does not permit one to dogmatize about the political invulnerability of modern capitalism. The seizure of power must always be accepted as an empirical possibility; but any judgement on the likelihood of this event, and of the kind of system that would result from it, may ultimately depend on whether one accepts the Leninist or Marxist view of the political capacities of a totally subordinate class.

(16) Bauman's view that capitalist states in the pre-welfare period were inherently vulnerable to revolutionary seizure seems to be based more on predictions of collapse than on the event itself. (Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Social Dissent in the East-European Political System*, *Europ. Journ. Sociol.*, XII (1971), 25-51. The European historical record contains in fact remarkably few instances of the successful overthrow of capitalism. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia provide the only examples of revolutionary transformation from capitalism to socialism, and in both cases the *ancien régime* was already in a state of imminent collapse as a result of war.

By contrast, the brief post-war history

of eastern Europe suggests that socialist states are considerably more vulnerable to the threat of internal dissolution. The survival of most of these states in their present form is guaranteed mainly by the authority of an external power. The typical European bourgeois state, on the other hand, has been required to accommodate to internal pressures in order to preserve its stability, since, with few exceptions, it has been unable to summon the aid of a greater sovereign power when threatened by internal revolt. Thus any proper assessment of the comparative stability of the two systems requires us to "think away" the Red Army when judging the viability of the ideal-typical socialist state.